






















Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Program (WAMS)

FY 2017 Frequently Asked Questions

Please refer to the [FY17 WAMS REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS](#) for complete application instructions.

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Purpose of the WAMS Grant Program

🍃 What is NIFA and what is its mission?

- Established in 2009, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture is a federal science agency within the Agriculture. Congress created [NIFA](#) through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. NIFA provides leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculturally-related sciences. The agency seeks to invest in and support initiatives that ensure the long-term viability of agriculture.

🍃 What is the purpose of the WAMS Grant Program?

- The purpose of this program is to support research and extension projects that increase participation by women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM. NIFA intends this program to address educational needs, as determined by each institution, within broadly defined areas of food and agricultural sciences and related disciplines. WAMS seeks to aid in the recruitment, cultivation, and development of the next generation of scientists, leaders, and a highly-skilled agricultural workforce,

🍃 What are the expectations for funded WAMS projects for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017?

- Any funded WAMS grant project is to support research and extension activities that: Provide STEM knowledge, skills and competencies to women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas with successful placement: (a) in the workforce in STEM fields, or (b) as innovators and entrepreneurs adding value to the STEM fields in areas that have relevancy to the USDA Secretary's priorities of Sustainable Energy; Climate Change; Food Safety; Nutrition and Childhood Obesity; and Global Food Security and Hunger.

Initiatives that WAMS might support include, but are not limited to:

- Implementing multi-track technology career advancement training programs and providing related services to engage and encourage participation by women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM fields;
- Developing and administering training programs for educators, career counselors, and industry representatives in recruitment and retention strategies to increase and retain women and underrepresented minority students and job entrants into STEM fields; and
- Supporting education-to-workforce programs for women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas to provide counseling, job shadowing, mentoring, and entrepreneurial internship opportunities to guide participants in the academic, training, and work experience needed for STEM careers.

- Developing practical applications to increase understanding of leadership roles, including critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills; ethics and professionalism; and working in teams;
- Connecting the academic classroom experience with daily leadership roles and organizational activities;
- Providing opportunities for mentoring and shadowing; and
- Organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, etc.

See RFA for more information.

🟢 **Can eligible applicants collaborate on WAMS projects?**

- Priority will be given to those grant proposals found in the peer review process to be scientifically meritorious and those that involve cooperation of multiple entities. Eligible applicants should develop robust collaborations to develop WAMS projects that will ensure successful placement of WAMS participants in STEM fields that address USDA mission areas.

WAMS Grant Support

🟢 **What types of applications are expected for the WAMS Grant Program?**

- In FY 2017, you may submit applications to the WAMS Program as one of the following types of requests:

New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the WAMS Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

Resubmitted application. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the WAMS Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate resubmitted applications in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B) as new applications.

🟢 **Is there a cost sharing or matching requirement for WAMS grant projects?**

- In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the **WAMS** program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA unless one of the exemptions described herein is applicable. Note that NIFA included [information](#) to further assist in determining if you must meet the new matching requirement.

🟢 **What are WAMS funding restrictions?**

- **Program funds may only be used for research and extension activities in the training, outreach and mentoring of rural women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM fields relevant to USDA mission.** Funds made available for grants in this program shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees).

Section 713 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total federal funds provided (or 42.857 percent of total direct costs) under each award. Similar language may be included in the FY 2017 appropriation, therefore, when

preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

Statutory language or agency policy limits the maximum potential funding period (including any awards transferred from another institution or organization) to five years in duration. The funding period will commence on the effective date cited in the award instrument. Any such limitation also applies to subcontracts made under awards subject to a funding period limitation.

See RFA for a complete description of funding restrictions.

What is the duration of the WAMS award?

- The project period may range from 12 to 36 months (one to three years).

Eligibility Requirements

Who is eligible to apply for a WAMS Grant?

- The eligibility requirements state that applicants must be: (a) State agricultural experiment stations; (b) colleges and universities; (c) university research foundations; (d) other research institutions and organizations; (e) Federal agencies; (f) national laboratories; (g) private organizations or corporations; (h) individuals; or (i) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (a) through (h).

Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award..

Will I be eligible to apply for a WAMS grant if I have an active award with NIFA through another program?

- Having a current award does not prevent you from applying. The objectives of your application to the WAMS Grant Program must be different from your current award.

Who is eligible to receive WAMS support?

- **Award Beneficiary Eligibility for WAMS Support** – It is the responsibility of the grantee institution to support only persons who meet the eligibility requirements provided in the Request for Applications (RFA). Eligible beneficiaries are from rural areas and must be: (i) Women and/or (ii) Underrepresented minorities.

What does “underrepresented minority” mean?

- Underrepresented minority means any ethnic group – African American, Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or any other group – whose representation among food and agricultural professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields is disproportionately less than their proportion in the general population as indicated in standard statistical references, or as documented on a case-by-case basis by national survey data submitted to and accepted by the Secretary.

Application Process

How do I apply for a WAMS grant?

- Applicants submit their WAMS application through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) portal. Applicants are advised to prepare their material early and pass the complete package through their institution's Grants Office for submission by 5:00 P.M (EASTERN) on the due date. Further information is included in the RFA.

What must I submit to apply?

- Application package as identified in the published Request for Applications (RFA).

🟢 **Can I submit more than one application as the Principal Investigator (Project Director) to the FY2017 WAMS program?**

- Eligible applicants may submit any number of applications but only one application as the Principal Investigator (Project Director).

🟢 **Is there a limit to the number of applications an institution can submit to the FY 2017 WAMS program?**

- A single eligible applicant (Project Director) may receive only one award. A single institution may receive ONLY one award.

🟢 **When are the WAMS applications due to NIFA?**

- Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on June 8, 2017 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time).

🟢 **What if I miss the deadline?**

- You may apply when the WAMS program publishes another call for applications. The WAMS application submission deadline is adhered to rigorously.

Evaluation Process

🟢 **What is the administrative review?**

- The WAMS Grants Program team conducts an initial administrative review of WAMS applications to determine compliance with requirements and complete content of applications. Only complete applications that meet all eligibility requirements, project requirements, and supporting documents described in the RFA will be considered for a merit review. Applications identified as incomplete or that do not meet the eligibility or complete application package requirements will be deemed ineligible.

🟢 **What is the merit review?**

- All complete WAMS applications from eligible institutions undergo a peer review by a panel of scientific experts in the areas of study related to the WAMS Grant Program. WAMS proposal will be evaluated using a peer review process to find win-win matches between the proposed work, capabilities of applicant organization(s), and the WAMS Grant Program purpose, priorities and goals. Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, and managers/operators in STEM fields) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application. Panel members rate applications based on the evaluation criteria described below.

🟢 **How will my application be evaluated?**

- Applications are evaluated by a review panel on the following criteria:
 1. Relevancy (20%)
 2. Technical Merit (35%)
 3. Achievability (15%)
 4. Key Personnel (10%)
 5. Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation of the proposed project (20%)

Following the completion of a peer review process for WAMS grant proposals, those grant proposals, found in the peer review process to be scientifically meritorious, will be given priority when they involve the cooperation of multiple entities [see 7 U.S.C. § 5925(d)]. See RFA for details.

Selection Process

When will I be notified with a decision?

- Applicants will generally be notified of their award status within six months of submitting an application.

Can I receive my scores and the review panel's comments?

- Yes. Panel comments are sent to each applicant after awards have been made.

WAMS Program Grantees

What happens once I am selected as a potential WAMS award recipient?

- WAMS Grant Program staff submits an offer of funding letter and requests responses to clarifying questions raised in the peer panel meeting. Applicants must respond to all issues and queries.

What are the responsibilities of a WAMS beneficiary?

- Beneficiaries must be engaged in a cross-section of disciplines relevant to USDA mission areas. The WAMS award enables WAMS beneficiaries – rural women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas, in STEM fields – to develop new knowledge and acquire skills to increase their participation in the STEM work force, in areas relevant to USDA mission.

How can I be a peer reviewer for this WAMS grant program?

- If you are not submitting an application, you may express your interest in serving as a reviewer and submit your curriculum vita via [email](mailto:michael.silas@nifa.usda.gov) (michael.silas@nifa.usda.gov). The selection of reviewers will be confirmed after the deadline for submission of applications.

Are there restrictions or conflicts that apply to serving as a reviewer?

- Yes. If any of the following apply as a relationship with any of the key personnel on a proposal, you are ineligible to serve as a peer reviewer for the proposal:
 - i. Co-author on any publication (print or digital), within the past three (3) years;
 - ii. Collaborator on teaching, research and/or extension projects, within the past three (3) years, or pending/planned future collaborations;
 - iii. Consulting arrangement, financial arrangement or any other conflict or interest, within the past three (3) years;
 - iv. Advisee/advisor on thesis, or dissertation, or postdoctoral training. There is a lifetime conflict for a major professor-advisee relationship. There is a three-year conflict for service on graduate committees, or as academic or professional mentor, including postdoctoral mentor;
 - v. Belonging to same institution. If you have moved from an institution, there is a one-year institutional conflict.

Additionally, the above restrictions (i - iv) apply.

If I am an applicant, can I serve as a reviewer for FY 2017 WAMS applications?

- No, as this is a potential conflict of interest.

How can I get answers about my WAMS application?

- The Request for Applications on NIFA's website has contact information for program questions. Look on NIFA's website for the RFA which has the contact number for the national program leader for NIFA. Questions can also be asked via email (michael.silas@nifa.usda.gov).

(Electronic Application Process Issues) questions: call 202- 401- 5048 OR electronic@nifa.usda.gov.

For Submission Issues in www.grants.gov seek assistance by e-mail: support@grants.gov or phone: 1-800-518-4726. Hours of Operation: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Disclaimer: This FAQ document is not a substitute for reading the published Request for Applications and providing the information requested for a complete WAMS Grant Program application package.